

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

OPENED BY EXCAVATION: SCIENTIFIC DISSEMINATION AND TOURISM IN SAN ESTEBAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (MURCIA, SPAIN)

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the relationship between archaeology and tourism has been the subject of numerous studies, which have highlighted the emergence of a distinct form of cultural tourism known as archaeological or archaeotourism. This type of tourism focuses on the promotion of archaeological heritage as a tourist attraction. Many authors consider heritage interpretation to be an effective tool for conservation and protection, on the basis that encouraging the population to value heritage will contribute to its preservation and enjoyment. Consequently, promoting public participation and interest benefits archaeological heritage. Murcia, with its rich archaeological heritage, is an ideal location for archaeological tourism. At the San Esteban archaeological site in the centre of Murcia, the largest known extension of the Andalusian suburb of La Arrixaca has been documented, covering an area of around 10,000 m². The scientific dissemination plan for the San Esteban archaeological site was developed within the framework of the site's research project. This article classifies the activities carried out in the plan and presents the results of the site's first public study. The obtained data demonstrate society's interest in the archaeological site and enable us to develop a tourist product.

OBJECTIVES

The paper's main aim is to present the outcomes of an ongoing research project's dissemination plan at a specific archaeological site, emphasising its potential as a tourist attraction based on qualitative and quantitative studies. The specific objectives include:

- Studying the social impact of the dissemination plan for the San Esteban archaeological site, developed between 2018 and 2020.
- Analysing the outreach activities carried out online and in person.
- Evaluating public interest in the archaeological site and its tourism potential.

- Comparing the dissemination initiatives developed at the San Esteban archaeological site with those at other sites in the Iberian Peninsula.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in the study includes the systematic collection of data generated by the dissemination plan of Project Phase 0 from its start in autumn 2018 until 2020. The activities carried out were quantified and classified according to whether they were conducted in person or online. Demographic data and content reach from the project's social media were obtained using the free analysis tools provided by the social media platforms themselves (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube), while data from the project's website were counted using Google Analytics. Information about attendees of the guided tours was obtained from registrations made on the Murcia City Council's website. The data obtained allowed the creation of various tables and graphs to illustrate the information and provide an approximation of the archaeological site's audience. Additionally, a comparative study was conducted between the initiatives developed by Project Phase 0 at the San Esteban archaeological site and other archaeological sites in the Iberian Peninsula.

RESULTS

In-Person Scientific Dissemination Activities

Inspired by the slogan 'Open for Works', which was initiated in 2000 during guided tours of the Cathedral of Vitoria's rehabilitation works, the guided tours allowed visitors to learn about the ongoing work at the site. The tours were aimed at the general public and were managed via a website provided by the Murcia City Council. During the tour periods, which included two archaeological excavation campaigns, the San Esteban archaeological site received a total of 3,545 visitors. Visitors were classified into the following categories: school students; high school and university students; members of associations and collectives; Murcia City Council employees; and individuals.

The tours began on 5 December 2018 and ended on 12 April 2019 for Phase 01-02 and from 30 September to 13 December 2019 for Phase 03. They were conducted from Monday to Friday at 12:00 pm and, later, between May and August 2019, on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 20:00, and between February and March 2020 on Wednesdays at 19:00. Due to the pandemic, the tours were suspended on 12 March 2020.

The maximum capacity for the tours was 25 people during Phase 01-02 and 35 people during Phase 03 for accessibility and safety reasons. The highest visitor numbers coincided with the months of archaeological excavation, when tours were available from

Monday to Friday. From May to August 2019 and from February to March 2020, the tours were conducted on two and one days a week, respectively

The type of visitor varied between phases. During Phases 01 and 02, 51% of visitors were individuals, whereas during Phase 03, 63% belonged to the education sector. Overall, the largest group was individuals (51.65%), followed by educational groups (34.41%). The educational groups were made up of a higher number of secondary school students,

followed by university and primary school students. The smallest group was visitors from associations and other collectives (13.94%).

Online Scientific Dissemination Activities

The project's website was designed as the main axis of the dissemination plan. It publishes weekly summaries of fieldwork and entries on archaeological methodology. It also publicises upcoming activities and provides news from the media, scientific publications and other resources, such as photos and videos. A total of 48,069 visits were received from 14,054 users in 78 different countries. Visits came from direct searches and links published on social media, with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram being the most prominent sources. The website's audience was predominantly male (54.15%), with the largest age group being 25 to 34 years old.

The social media profiles (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube) were conceived as a more direct way of communicating with the public by publishing concise, visual content. The Twitter account @SanEstebanUM had its greatest impact in May and February 2019, with 40,200 and 55,800 tweet impressions, respectively. The Facebook page "Conjunto Arqueológico de San Esteban UM" had its greatest impact in February 2019, with over 1,500 people viewing the page's content. In terms of the demographic characteristics of Facebook followers, there were slightly more women than men, and the largest age group was 25 to 34 years old. The Instagram account @sanestebanum has similar demographic characteristics to the Facebook page, with a slightly higher percentage of female followers, and the largest age group is also 25 to 34 years old. The YouTube channel "ConjuntoArqueologicoSanEstebanUM" received a total of 3,569 views and 17,585 impressions, the majority of which came from Spain, followed by Peru, Mexico, and the United Kingdom.

CONCLUSIONS

The dissemination plan for the San Esteban archaeological site has been successful in raising public awareness of and encouraging participation in Murcia's archaeological heritage. Guided tours have allowed more than 3,000 people to learn about the site, while online activities have complemented and expanded the reach of the dissemination efforts. A comparative study of other archaeological sites reveals similarities and differences between the San Esteban site's initiatives and those of other projects, particularly in terms of the types of activities conducted. It is expected that, in the future, the San Esteban archaeological site will be integrated and enhanced as a tourist resource, contributing to the socio-economic development of Murcia and the conservation of archaeological heritage.

The research project at the San Esteban archaeological site recognises that publicising the research and excavation processes will encourage society to develop an appreciation of the site and its heritage. By sharing its findings, archaeology transcends the realm of technical reports, creating and communicating historical narratives and serving as a tool for preserving and raising awareness of archaeological remains. The data presented in

this article, particularly that relating to the study of the guided tour audience, demonstrate public interest in Murcia's archaeological heritage and its potential for individual tourism.

This study identifies the San Esteban archaeological site as a driving force behind tourism and socio-economic development. However, it should not be viewed in isolation, but rather as a starting point for its integration and enhancement from a tourism perspective, through local and provincial public and private initiatives. At the same time, it is crucial to promote archaeological heritage in a way that maintains historical, social and cultural rigour. Therefore, historical and archaeological research must generate quality content that can be incorporated into tourism products.

Archaeological heritage can be used to promote economic development, and tourism can raise awareness of it within society. However, the success of this approach hinges on the support of public institutions and the local population. Tourism development and the strategic utilisation of resources must be undertaken with a clear commitment from local governments. This commitment should include the participation of private entities and consider multiple interrelated dimensions, such as tourism, culture, the environment, heritage and society. Close collaboration is required between interdisciplinary teams of researchers and municipal technicians. This will help us create a productive fabric and generate sustainable, accessible and profitable employment from the perspective of archaeological heritage. Forming alliances between urban, territorial, tourism and cultural planning will enable this site to become a tourist attraction that contributes to the municipality's socio-economic development. In this way, the site will transcend its historical and cultural dimensions, fostering greater social commitment to the active conservation of cultural heritage.